

Clockwise from top, Insignia on the road; Insignia rear light safety; Insignia cabin



“THE RESULT IS A CAR WHICH IS MORE REWARDING TO DRIVE THAN MANY OTHER LARGE TURBO DIESEL MOTORS ON THE MARKET”

VAUXHALL INSIGNIA BiTurbo SRi Sports Tourer

Fine Motoring by
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There are many things I like about this car and just a couple of tiny things I don't. Let's get the grumbles out of the way first.

The Vauxhall Insignia needs better wing mirrors. They're just too small and narrow to give you a confident view - especially when changing lanes on motorways. The other small niggle is the steering wheel. It's big enough to belong in a bus. But these minor issues are eclipsed by the motor's merits.

For a start, the Insignia is a good looking estate (Sports Tourer in today's parlance). It comes loaded with equipment; it's practical; it's comfortable, and it's satisfying to drive. But the model on test here - the BiTurbo SRi Sports Tourer - is not just the usual griffin labelled, load-lugging, mile-muncher. Why? Because under the bonnet, Vauxhall has shoehorned in its most commanding diesel engine ever. It produces 192 bhp and 295 lb/ft of torque, and yet CO2 emissions are only 134 g/km.

The heady, twin-sequential turbocharged oil-burner is based on the existing 1956 cc unit that powers key models in the Insignia, Astra and Zafira Tourer range. However, in BiTurbo form

it delivers an extra 34.5 bhp and a significant 37 lb/ft of further 'get-up-and-go'. The result for the Sports Tourer is 0-60 mph in 8.4 seconds. It's the sort of acceleration that gives you that perceptible 'pulled back into your seat' feeling.

Complementing this power gain, Vauxhall's FlexRide adaptive damping is standard on all Insignia BiTurbos (normally a £790 option on front-wheel drive models). The system can 'learn' how you drive the car and adapts the dampers accordingly. You can also select Tour and Sport buttons, and configure the throttle, steering and damper settings in Sport mode separately.

The result is a car which is more rewarding to drive than many other large turbo diesel motors on the market. In Sport mode it's taut, quick, and it takes corners on rails. In Tour mode it's a gracious and unflappable vehicle, and one which will give you a magic carpet ride to work. In normal mode, it's simply a good estate car with poke.

Unsurprisingly, the Sports Tourer has a big area for loading, and cleverly, under the powered tailgate (which incorporates the rear light clusters), there is an additional set of rear lights, making the car highly visible to other road users



if you need to sort out your luggage after the sun has gone down.

Finally, thanks to a package of eco features - including standard Start/Stop across the range - the Insignia BiTurbo Sports Tourer manages to achieve a combined 55.4 mpg. This is the last piece of the jigsaw to make the car a great all-rounder. It's economical and spacious enough to be the main family car; its emissions are low enough to make it an affordable yet very smart business motor, and, of course, the potency of its engine will bring out the devil in you when you feel the need for speed.

Lotus Exige S

THIS BRITISH MADE gem does 0-62 mph in just 4 seconds. Better still, it can do 100 mph in 8.5 seconds and stick to corners like a limpet.

The maximum speed reached in this brute is 170 mph, and because you're seated so low in the confined cabin, everything about the Exige S feels even faster than it is.



Along with its staggering clout the Exige S has a totally fresh look and feel. The spectacular styling revamp sees a new front splitter and rear spoiler, giving it a brawny, yet sleek, profile.

The Exige S is not for the lily-livered. It scares the pants off you at first, but after a few minutes behind the wheel it inspires confidence and more than satisfies any lust for speed, power, grip - and the smell of burnt rubber. Quite frankly you can't get more Lotus than the Exige S.

Max speed: 170 mph | 0-62 mph: 4.0 secs | CO2: 236 g/km | Price: £52,900 on the road

Great Wall Steed S

ON SALE through a nationwide network of 40 dealers the Steed is a tough and practical motor, equally adept as a workhorse or a weekend getaway vehicle. It's also one of the most affordable pick-up trucks in Britain - both to buy and to run. Prices start at just £13,998 for the 'S' model and its 2.0-litre, 16-valve turbocharged diesel powerplant sips rather than guzzles fuel - returning an average fuel economy of 34 mpg.



Carrying capacity compares very well with well-known pick-up rivals and, inside, the four-door Steed's double-cab body is well proportioned. Slide behind the wheel and the driving position is good, with all the dials and controls easy to see and use.

On the road, the Steed is certainly not quick. It takes an absolute age to get from 0-62 mph - 17 yawn-inducing seconds in fact. It also has a top speed of just 87 mph. That said, when it gets rolling it does a good enough job of getting you from A to B.

Max speed: 87 mph | 0-62 mph: 17 secs | CO2: 220 g/km | Price: £13,998 on the road

Mazda3 1.6D TS2

The Mazda3 is big enough for a family of four. Your adult passengers won't be stretching their legs out in the back, but they won't be doing that in any medium sized car.



Aesthetically, the Mazda3 is appealing; in fact, it has had a makeover for 2012, giving it a more muscular, aerodynamic, look. As well as general improvements to its appearance, and little tweaks here and there to make it even more driver friendly, the Mazda3's fuel economy has been enhanced. If you're careful, you can now get a maximum of 65.7 mpg out of the hatchback.

The TS2 model comes well equipped with front fog lights, dusk-sensing lights and rain-sensing front wipers. It also has Integrated Bluetooth, a heated windscreen and cruise control. But you won't get much change out of £20,000 if you want a brand new Mazda3 with this level of kit and a turbo diesel under the bonnet. The 1.6D TS2 will set you back £18,295. Still, in today's market, that's actually pretty competitive.

Max speed: 116 mph | 0-62 mph: 11.0 secs | CO2: 115 g/km | £18,295 on the road